Grande Prairie Herald

Historical Edition.

A GLIMPSE OF THE PEACE RIVER VALLEY.

--by Elizabeth Pearston, O.B.E.

The Peace River country! One wonders what the fascination is.

After spending eighteen months in the country it is more than fascination--it seems to hold one. Many are the tales of hardship and endurance of the people despite the many obstacles which they have encountered. The country itself is beautiful from the top of Richmond Hill, about six miles west of Grande Prairie one never tires of just looking at the hills and lakes.

The history of the hospital alone is just a little story of the self-sacrifice and vision of the pioneers of the country and so far as the nurses are concerned, has a definite influence in urging them to contribute their share, and so keep the history unsullied and of lasting benefit.

In the spring of 1910 Dr. Alexander Forbes and Mrs. Agnes Forbes of the Presbyterian Mission, came to the country by caboose. They encountered many hardships, but nothing daunted they progressed on their way. They settled that year at Flying Shot, a few miles west of where Grande Prairie is situated today.

Mrs. Forbes was ever ready in cases of need or cases of distress and when it so happened that one of a party of surveyors "North of the Peace" sustained an injury to his leg, he was brought to Mrs. Forbes by Dr. Montgomery for nursing

care. The Forbes' home was always filled to beyond capacity, and on this occasion it was no exception to the rule, a tent was erected alongside the house, to house the patient and he was nursed back to usefulness by Mrs. Forbes.

This, so far as can be found out, was the beginning of the Municipal Hospital of Grande Prairie Number 14, as it is called today.

Mrs. Forbes continued to nurse the sick of the district and in the autumn of 1910 she found the need of help so great that Miss Agens Baird, a graduate of a hospital in Kansas, U.S.A., joined her. Miss Baird's services were called upon from time to time throughout the whole district which covered an area of about 50 miles. One must remember that in those days there were no roads to speak of, and the only means of transit over certain parts of the country were horse back and on foot.

There are many stories of Miss Baird's resourcefulness and the following is only one incident that has been related: "Word came to Dr. Forbes of a sick man about 45 miles distant from Flying Shot and absolutely isolated. Miss Baird mounted her horse and away she went. She found the patient in dire need and suffering from advanced tuberculosis. Following another arduous trip to make arrangements for supplies, she remained with the patient for several weeks, volunteers plying back and forth from Flying Shot with supplies."

During the winter of 1910 Dr. Forbes moved to Grande Prairie where he had already staked ground for church purposes. A log church was built in Grande Prairie in the

summer of 1911, and later in that year the manse was also built.

The need of a hospital was becoming greater each month and when the manse itself, tents on the lawn, and the caboose (which had brought the Forbes' into the country) could no longer accommodate the sick people of the district, a long log room was added to the manse building, and this served as the hospital of the district under the joint management of Mrs. Forbes and Miss Baird. In this, as before, history repeated itself, and again the accommodation proved inadequate.

In 1913 the Home Mission Board presented a sum of money to the church to help erect a hospital for the district. After taking into consideration the cost of materials and the difficulty of getting them into the country, the amount provided seemed inadequate to cover expenses, so the people got together and a log hospital was built by voluntary aid and the sum of money donated devoted to expenses of equipment. The hospital was opened in 1914 and called the "Katherine Pridie Hospital" in memory of the daughter of a Toronto family who had subscribed funds to the Home Mission Board to assist in building the hospital. The hospital was now removed from the direct control of Mrs. Forbes, but she continued to give active support and kept closely in touch with its affairs until her death in 1917. Might I mention here that the influence of this wonderful woman still seems to hover us. The "oldtimers" of the district never tire of telling of her kindness and unselfishness, and further the

log manse that housed so many of the unfortunates of the district in Dr. Forbes' time is now the Nurses' Home. Nine nurses are crowded into inadequate quarters, but there is something about the place that makes them forget the inconveniences, and they find it a haven of peace and rest after the turmoil of a heavy day. I often wish that some of you away down there in Winnipeg could look in on those happy bright young nurses sewing, reading, sleeping ! ! ! around the fireplace. It is truly a "home" for the present, as no doubt it was to strangers in days gone by.

To continue, the building opened in 1914 was always filled and in due time it was necessary to erect a new operating room. The people of the district collected sufficient funds to meet this need, and in 1920 an operating room was built.

In 1922 the hospital was taken over by the Municipality under the supervision of the Department of Health. In 1927 an enlarged scheme was floated to finance the building of a new hospital, and this in itself would make an interesting story.

In the spring of 1929 the present up-to-date brick building was opened, the Superintendent of Nurses being Miss Hibbs (now Mrs. Louis Fredette) a graduate of Vancouver General Hospital, who had been matron for some years in the old hospital.

The hospital of today stands a little to the east of the site of the old hospital, and is about a half mile from

the town of Grande Prairie. It has a capacity of forty beds, but the record capacity is 51; this necessitated getting convalescent patients out of their respective beds and putting them in temporary cots in the corridor. The public wards are bright rooms equipped with Fowler and Gatch beds and each bed screened. Sun porches open off both wards. The maternity wards have two and three beds to a room. The nursery is equipped for 12 babies. The operating room and case room are up-to-date and with the equipment we have we manage to maintain a technique which I know does credit to our training schools. All the nurses are graduates from accredited schools and there are six of the medical profession who use the hospital. There is still a great deal to be accomplished in this hospital of the people and if we are humble in our demands at the present time because of financial depression we know that when the time comes to expand the people of the district will be ready to give their support in furthering the efforts of those concerned to adequately care for the sick of their community.

It will, no doubt be of interest to the readers of the Winnipeg General Hospital Alumnae Magazine to know that Mrs. Little (Janet Gibson, 1911), wife of Dr. E.L. Little, one of our attending physicians, is a graduate of the Winnipeg General Hospital; also Mrs. J.W. Sawyer (Rebecca Ayr, 1910) wife of the former Secretary-Treasurer of the Hospital. Another item of interest is that Miss Dalgleish (now Mrs. J.M. Kerr), assistant superintendent of Nurses, is a graduate

of Vancouver General Hospital, and trained under Miss Ellis, so altogether we feel we have the support and sympathy of the Winnipeg General Hospital.